

Hon. Brian M. Morris
Missouri River Courthouse
125 Central Avenue West
Suite 301
Great Falls, MT 59404

5 June 2023

Re: *U.S. v. John Russell Howald, CR-21-04-H-BMM*

I have known Russell his whole life, I am his mothers sister.

He has always been a loving young man willing to help others in need.

If he saw any of the elderly in our Basin community in need of firewood, he would drop off a load for them at no charge.

Many times I have seen him help a stranded motorist who had come into Basin looking for a mechanic or in need of gas. He would either work on their vehicles or take a gas can to Boulder to get gas for them.

I have been to federal prison and my life was drastically changed by RDAP. I am coming up on 8 years of sobriety, I am reconnected with my community and a productive member of society. I was recently released from supervision 2 years and 4 days early.

I understand that Russell needs to be held accountable for his actions and face the consequences. Russell has been struggling with his addictions for years. I believe if he were given the opportunity to attend the RDAP in prison he would benefit immensely. He is still a young man and has a lot to offer his community and family if he were afforded the time.

Sincerely,

/s/Judith M. Collins

Dear Judge

Hon. Brian M. Morris
Missouri River Courthouse
125 Central Avenue West
Suite 301
Great Falls MT 59404

Re US v. John Russell Howald CR-21-04-H-BMM

My name is Jackie Colombe. I am Russell's aunt, his mom is my sister.

At a very young age - Russell's father kidnapped him and his brother, and we were not a part of his life until he became a teenager and his dad decided to bring him back into our lives. His life with his dad consisted of many moves and many "step-moms". This of course is not ideal for a young man and left him without good role models until he became a part of our lives. He looked up to his grandpa, my dad, and also my two brothers who took him hunting and fishing, and generally did all the things uncles and grandpas do with their nephews / grandsons.

Russell thrived under the umbrella of a stable family. He is the oldest of the cousins - as I have 5 siblings - he had many of them to be the "protector" for - and he always took this responsibility very seriously. As the oldest, he made sure that his younger female cousins were treated with respect, and if they ever needed any help, he was always

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the first to offer aid, whether that aid was physical assistance or monetary assistance. He does that to this day. My niece Amy moved far away when she became an adult, and Russell, many times, has helped her when things were financially tight for her. He made sure the girls were always able to contact him if ever they were in need.

Russell lived with me for a time, about five years. During that time, I did get close to him and feel that I know him very well. I could see the love and respect he had for my dad and for me too. It is hard for Russell to express himself in a healthy way, and because of this, he gets himself into trouble with his choice of words - when he feels sad or angry - he does what he did as a child, and says the most ridiculous things to get attention as he struggles to identify his feelings.

I am convinced this is what happened the day he said those horrible things he said. Russell was struggling with the loss of his grandpa, which followed the loss of both of his uncles, my brothers, in a very short time he found himself as the oldest male in our family, and I'm sure this was very hard, and frightening to him.

Alcoholism has been an issue with some family members, and our Native American heritage does not do well when alcohol is involved. It is my true belief that as he sat on his grandpa's porch that day, mourning the loss of both uncles, and now his grandpa, he made several bad decisions. I truly believe that he wanted to die that day, and he had told me well before this day that if he ever wanted to die, it would have to be suicide by cop, as he wouldn't be able to do it himself.

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All of the time I have spent with my nephew through the years, I know 2 things about him. One is that he is the kind of man who will do whatever ~~he can~~ he can to help others when he sees they are down on their luck. The second is that alcohol and Russell are not good together. When under the influence he can say things that he knows will cause a reaction, and in an alcohol induced state, he takes on the ideals and attitudes of those around him, even though he may not feel the same or believe the same things when he is sober. And he feels horrible about saying those things when he sobers up.

Russell is not Racist. He does not hate gay or lesbians. He has dated women of color, and has gay men as friends. I don't know why Katie Jones, a lesbian who's house is 2 down from my dad's house, says she doesn't know him. She has been cruel to both myself and Russell throughout the years, as we all were on the fire department together, and she always looked down her nose at both he and I, because we didn't do exactly as she wanted us to do. She was a trustee, I was the Fire Chief, and then a trustee, and we butted heads. Russell and I both have an intense dislike for her, but not because of her sexual orientation - we disliked her because she treated us like - pardon my expression your honour - she treated us like shit. Sitting there, he could see her house.

The reason I mention this is because I feel that when Russell was on dad's porch he wasn't able to express what he was feeling. And when the Hales approached him, he grabbed onto his

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belief that he could rile up the churchgoers by
spouting off about gays and lesbians.
And in his despair - he felt that this would also
bring a confrontation with the cops so he could
die without doing it himself.

Your honour - Russell's behavior was unacceptable.
But it truly was not a hate crime in the true sense.
It was an attempt to end his life - and his
despair.

Russell is a very loving and compassionate man.
When alcohol is added - he is an idiot. I don't
believe he should be punished for what is clearly
a mental health issue - rather than a hate issue.
Justice would best be served if Russell could get
the mental health help he needs - Make him take
the meds that make you sick if you drink alcohol.
Make him go to mental health counseling to learn how
to express himself in a healthy way. Make him
pay restitution for any harm he caused. There are
many ways you could punish him that would
help him be the productive citizen he is most of
the time - that would make him be that person
all of the time.

Putting Russell in prison for an extended length of
time does not help him or society. He is, and
can continue to be, a productive citizen, if you
help him to be able to continue doing so. May wisdom
guide you in your decision. Thank you for your
time, and consideration of my words your honour.

Sincerely - Russell's Aunt

Jackie Colombe, Basin, MT 406 479 4604

5/6/23.

This is Mike Jellison and i am writing this in regards to Russell Howard. I have known Russell for many years and i believe Russell is a good man who simply needs help with his alcohol problem. He has always been a hard worker and i believe his addiction issues can be turned around with help. I believe his time served which is now about 2 years are sufficient, seeing how nobody was harmed in the act. I think it would be a travesty to have him spend the rest of his time behind bars, when i believe he can still be an asset to his community and the work force with help. I have to believe there are programs for Russell to turn his life in a more positive direction.

Thank you for your consideration

Mike Jellison
Basin MT.

June 5, 2023

Hon. Brian M. Morris
Missouri River Courthouse
125 Central Avenue West
Suite 301
Great Falls, MT 59404

Re: U.S. v. John Russell Howald, CR-21-04-H-BMM

Your Honor:

I am writing this letter in the interest of continued Justice. I can't envy your task. My letter is given just in case any of my considerations might have meaning to you in your able decision.

I am the pastor (since July 1, 1975) in Basin at the Church, in front of which, Ron and Stacy Hale's obvious providential encounter of Russell occurred. I was on the street with them for a brief period of their encounter. The phone recorder was in my pocket.

I had never met Russell before that time. I was face to face with him and the discharging rifle came right up in front of me. I could have touched it.

So intent was Ron's conversation with Russell at that time and so sudden and unexpected the firing that it did not occur to me to have the slightest fear or concern for anyone's safety. The recording shows Ron's reaction as he tells Russell that someone "might" have gotten shot.

As I testified, I thought Ron's logic and expressed concerns (and Stacy's embrace) was undermining Russell's intent. I thought that his firing was the result of trying to defend and muster back up that intent.

So it seemed to me that the trigger pull was virtually involuntary. I would think that Russell, himself, was also surprised at the discharge.

It seemed to me that against Russell's desire, his determination was being very greatly diminished by Ron. Obviously the inner stress of Russell was overwhelming and his driving purpose (whatever that was) was alarming.

So now in Basin GRATITUDE has to be the abiding motivation. It is amazing the directions of that Gratitude!

Because of the gravity of the situation I have to, surprisingly, not only commend Ron and his Wife but also commend Russell. The commendation due Russell is, in fact, very obvious from the fact that this event ended without further mishap.

Russell had the means and the apparent intent to end it differently. It clearly was even left to his decision. Walking away fully armed, he had to walk by several of the houses he had marked as targets.

So commend him - no more mishap. Certainly in far less dramatic fashion our time seems full of "mishap".

How fortunate we are that we are also demanded to extend that commendation of Gratitude to that Officer entrusted with our Law Enforcement that day. This is all in mystery but it is so obvious - no national, even regional, news event.

The police do not fire? One has to ask Why?

That is a big issue from the trained Officer right in the center of the major crisis. What an amazing verdict by that Sheriff - the verdict of on the scene Law and Order - don't shoot the man!

Even an overpowering verdict to that of the Court. For without that Sheriff's decision there would be no man to consider the question of the right sentence.

Even today, as to Russell's inner makeup, it seems to say something significant for that Sheriff to let so heavenly armed, so aggressive, and gun to gun man walk away.

So why Sheriff? He probably has not found the answer himself.

I remember Russell previously calling out "Come-on cops!" He had the chance to shoot one but maybe his stress wanted to be shot by one instead. The whole incident is full of wonder.

Certainly his words telling me to leave - "I don't want to hurt you!" - was somewhat of a stange concern for his appearance and armament. All through my encounter I seem to remember an underlying concern not to hurt randomly.

I guess it ought to be obvious that from my perspective GOD WAS IN CHARGE OF THAT DAY! It seems to me that Ron and Stacy left a different man on that street than the one that had just walked past our Church.

The only intervening event was their council and love. Russell was left to walk away alive.

In light of the above, and more, and in such a violent world I can envision Russell the kind of man who reaches school assemblies. Certainly he would bring a compelling story and probably he would love and be blessed to have good come out of all this. Who knows it might be the first time real meaning rises out of his life. Bless a man and bless our world.

Already a different man - on the street! and now from the prison! And with more help who can comprehend the value to society that circumstances suggest might rise out of him?

So our Justice System - Court and Prison - gets its chance to continue to change a man for that good that he could bring to the confusion of our stressed times. We would certainly personally be blessed if we were allowed to communicate that concept to him by visit, phone and text.

We were told we could not visit until this was over due to the fact we were witnesses. If appropriate, I would be thankful to be allowed to declare publicly this consideration at the sentencing hearing.

Yes! I guess it ought to be obvious that from my perspective GOD WAS IN CHARGE OF THAT DAY! and it seems to me that GOD used Ron and Stacy to demonstrate that.

Thank you for your worthy time.

Sincerely,
Floyd Oliver
Pastor